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Exploration and Discovery

A THIRD "HIGH-PLACE" AT PETRA

In November, 1905, I had the privilege of a second visit to Petra in company with Professor P. V. N. Myers, the historian, of College Hill, Ohio, and together we had the pleasure of making additions to our knowledge of Petra, especially in connection with the high-places.¹ We visited the old high-place, and confirmed the existence of *four* magnificent stairways leading to this center of ancient worship.² At the second high-place we discovered the existence of a second gallery³ cut into the face of the cliff about 30 feet below the other gallery, and leading to one of the four stairways at the rock on which the high-place is located.

Then we proceeded to confirm the impression expressed that "similar places of worship will yet be found in other parts of the city and its surrounding rocky ramparts."⁴ Disregarding the repeated assurances of the natives of the region that there was nothing more to be found in certain directions, we made up our minds to scale the peak called el-Khibzy, or el-Khubthy, to the east and immediately above the celebrated "Corinthian Tomb" and the "Tomb with the Urn." Before our visit was over, we had the rare pleasure of discovering a third high-place, which in certain respects easily matches the old high-place now so well known in pictures by the two obelisks.

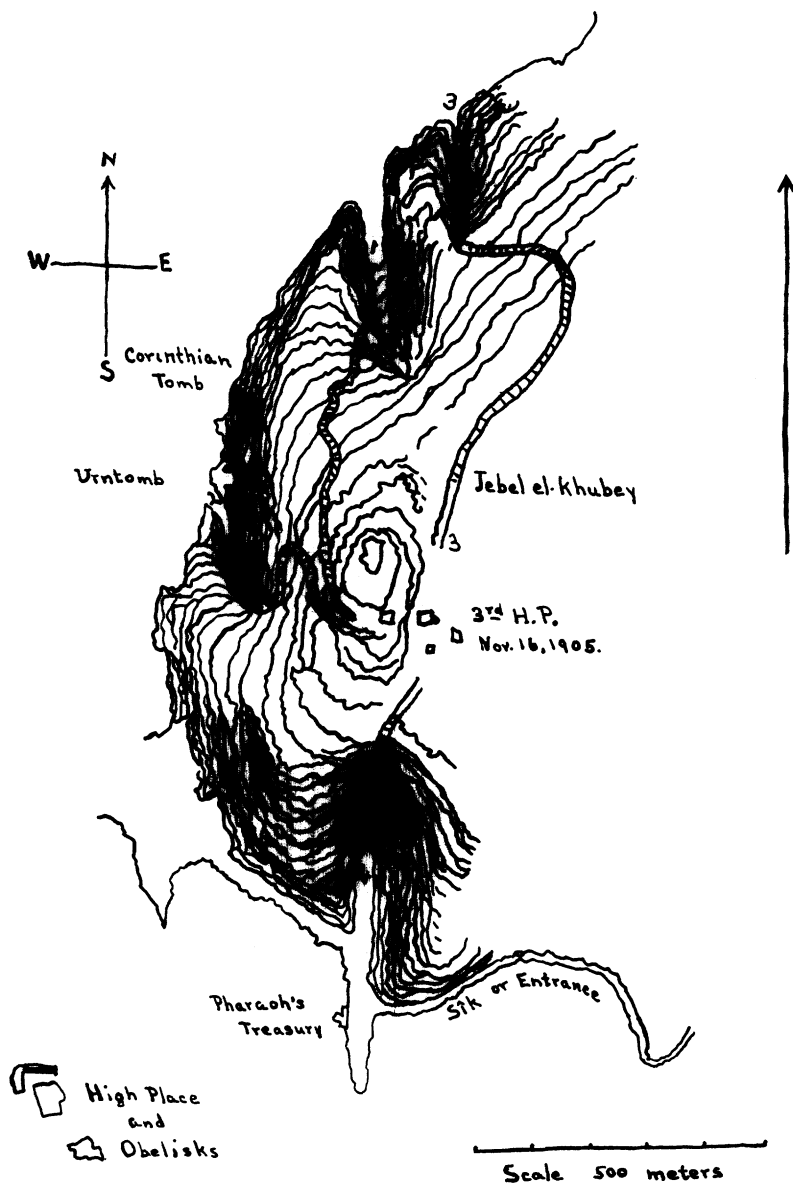
This third high-place is situated high above and a little to the southeast of the "Urn Tomb," and is approached by at least *four* colossal stairways which wind up and among the rocks, crossing ravines, cutting boldly through great shoulders of the mountain, until they attain a height of more than 3,500 feet, or more than 600 feet above the floor of the valley. Our first clue, discovered late one afternoon, was the lower end of the stairway, numbered 1 on the sketch. At the point where we struck it the pathway enters a cyclopean cutting, as seen in Fig. 1, the entrance to which was once guarded and defended by colossal doors, as shown by the side walls, the sockets, and the cuttings for the lintel and the bars. With a width of 12 feet and a height of 30 feet, this one cutting extended for nearly 100 feet. Just beyond this cutting the stairway clinging to the side of the ravine is so

¹ See the *Biblical World*, January, 1901, and March, 1903.

² See Libbey and Hoskins, *The Jordan Valley and Petra*, Vol. II, p. 179.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 192, 200.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 207.



badly damaged for some 50 yards that none but a skilful climber can pass the dangerous break; but the continuation of it is plainly visible in the ravine above, and later on we saw the upper end of it near the mountain-top.

The next morning (November 16, 1905) we planned an ascent by a

ravine just south of the "Urn Tomb," marked 2 in the sketch map, and very soon struck another stairway that led us safely up the very face of the mountain by windings and cuttings that made our blood tingle with excite-

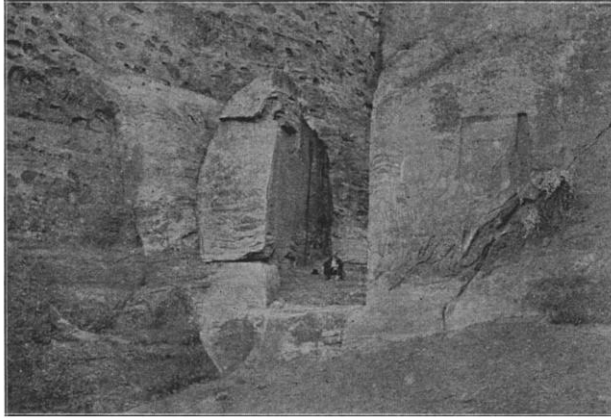


FIG. 1.—Stairway to third high-place, once guarded by colossal doors.

ment. While there was danger enough at a dozen points where the sandstone steps had crumbled away, higher up it became broad and easy. Here and there the pathway ran out upon ledges which afforded superb views of the valley and peaks beyond. Fig. 2 gives a backward view of one of the cuttings on this second stairway.

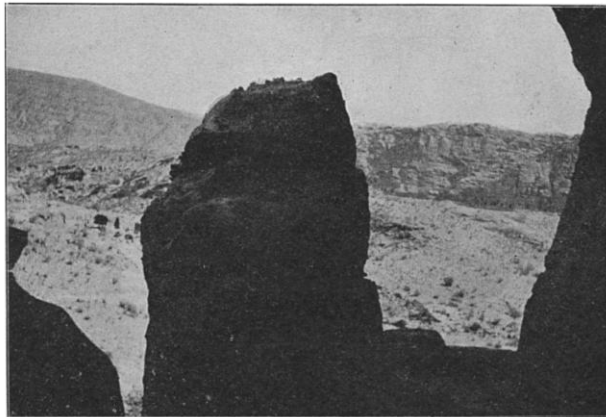


FIG. 2.—Cutting and distant view on second stairway.

All the way up, even to the tops of the highest peaks, we found smaller stairways and an elaborate system of rain conductors cut in the rock, and gathering the rills of rain water into larger channels which led to cisterns and pools, making possible here also the beauties seen in the "Fairy Dell."⁵ We noted also, when just above the great carved tombs and tem-

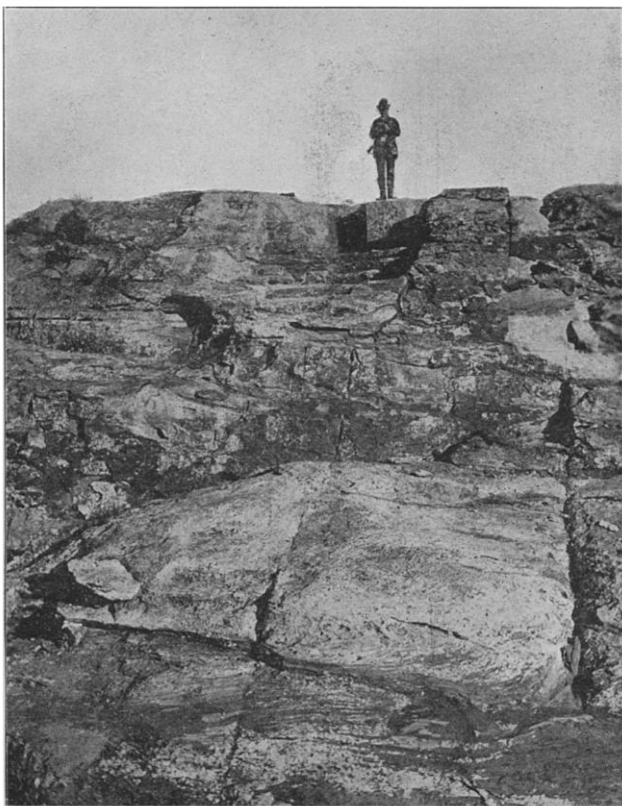


FIG. 3.—Third high-place. Square altar with cuttings on top.

ples, how carefully they cut these conductors to keep the rain from streaming down the face of the monuments, and thus prevented them from hasty decay.

When we reached the plateau among the very highest peaks, we saw signs of cutting and excavation in every direction. It did not require many minutes of almost breathless search to find what we had traveled so

⁵ See Libbey and Hoskins, *op. cit.*, pp. 167 f.

far to see—all the features of another high-place! Fig. 3 shows the main altar, approached by stairs and carrying the same kind of cuttings as seen in the old high-place. A few rods away (Fig. 4), where the Arab stands (Fig. 5), is a court ending in a round or pan altar; and still farther to the right (Fig. 4), where the American is standing, are the pools. The open space in front of these altars and the pools would accommodate a greater number of worshippers than could ever have come within sight

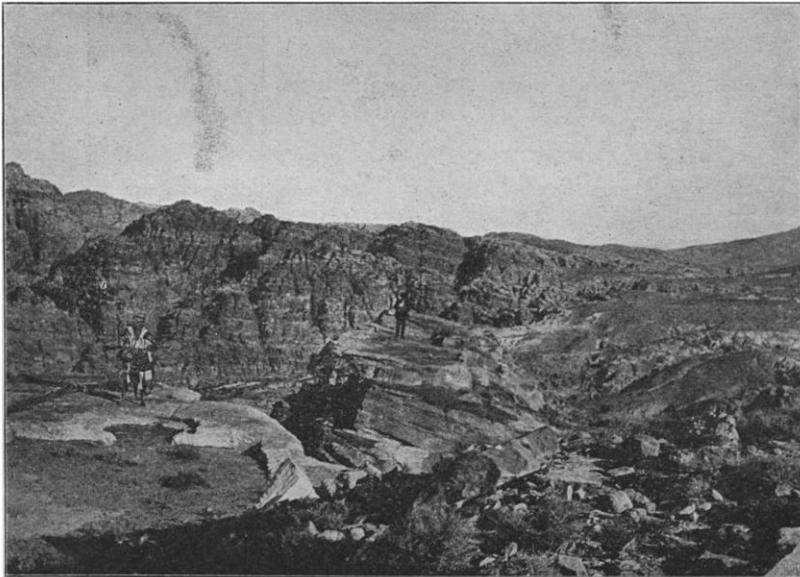


FIG. 4.—Third high-place. Court and pan altar to the left; two pools to the right.

and hearing at the first high-place. The court or cutting at the pan altar (Fig. 5) is about 10 feet wide by 15 feet long; the large pool is 6 by 6 feet, and the small one 2 by 4 feet.

The configuration of the ravine toward the north led us to search for another stairway leading down to the extreme northern quarter of the city. Again we were not disappointed, for the stairway is there, and is also of splendid proportions. This is marked 3 in the sketch. After examining many of the domelike peaks, and noting the system of rain conductors on them all, we easily traced the larger channels to an enormous cistern, the remains of which, with one of the roof arches, can be seen in Fig. 6. We saw many signs of cuttings in the peaks farther off, stairways to almost every eminence, but did not have time to make any more minute examinations.

It now remained to verify another guess that a *fourth* stairway would be found leading down to "Pharaoh's Treasury." Here again we were right, and by this fourth stairway we made the descent. The ravine here is so exceedingly steep that the falling bowlders have almost wiped out the great



FIG. 5.—Third high-place. Court and pan altar.



FIG. 6.—Remains of large cistern.

stairway; but we saw enough traces and deep cuttings to prove its former existence, and we actually succeeded in getting safely down to the "Treasury" after one of the most exciting experiences of our lives.

BEIRÛT, SYRIA,
February, 1906.

F E. HOSKINS.